

Artillery Magazine, Gallery Rounds, July 20, 2016
Richard Heller Gallery: Joakim Ojanen
by Jody Zellen



Friends from the Past (2016)

Swedish artist Joakim Ojanen creates paintings and ceramic sculptures that are quirky and compassionate. His part-human / part-animal creatures have distinct personalities and are full of feeling and emotion. Though the overall sentiment is a kind of melancholy, Ojanen's exhibition is remarkably refreshing and uplifting. The figures' frowns elicit smiles from the viewer.

Ojanen's ten paintings are strategically placed on the gallery walls, complementing the sculptures. Each is a 3/4 portrait of a doll-like figure against a light monochrome background. One, *Untitled Portrait 07* (2015), appears to be an altered version of a figure in *Picnic* (2016) as both wear a baseball cap with the number 85.

The larger ceramics—both busts and full figures—sit in solitude on pedestals whereas many of the smaller works are presented in clusters. Ojanen also presents two tableaux with numerous ceramic items. *Picnic* and *Friends from the Past* (2016) are quasi-narratives where Ojanen's cartoony figures are seen together but not interacting, isolated from each other—reading a comic, holding a ball or staring longingly out into space.

Viewing the exhibition is akin to stepping into a world dominated by children, specifically boys in short-pants smoking, reading, drawing or playing. Many of the heads have long noses and floppy ears that often function like arms holding pieces of fruit atop their heads or wiping away tears. Amidst these sad boys are a few happy dogs. That the animals are the only creatures to

smile says a lot about Ojanen's world view, or at least speaks to the difficulties of growing up. This is reinforced through Ojanen's titles. *Indecisive* (2016) is a double nosed, three eyed and three legged ceramic boy. The painting *I Hate Mondays* (2016) features a slumped-over baseball capped figure who refuses to move.

Ojanen's painted and ceramic figures are minimal and not rendered in exacting detail. Their large eyes, long noses, shorts, striped or logoed t-shirts and drooping cigarettes delineate an attitude of insecurity and defiance, yet rather than elicit stoicism they are empathetic, yearning and delightfully whimsical.

Joakim Ojanen, "What a Time to be Alive :(", June 25 – July 30 at Richard Heller Gallery, 2525 Michigan Avenue, #B-5A, Santa Monica, CA, www.richardhellergallery.com



I Hate Mondays (2016)